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Environmental groups support storm water plan

Carmel and Pebble Beach Company won't sign on.

By RYAN MASTERS

The Natural Resources Defense Council and Friends of the Sea Otters have lent their support to the Monterey Region's Storm Water Management Plan.

The plan, five years in the making, is intended to monitor and reduce urban runoff into the Monterey Bay Sanctuary and local Areas of Special Biological Significance (ASBS).

While neither NRDC nor Friends of the Sea Otters have the authority to approve the storm water plan, local city officials hope that having the two groups' support will increase the chances of winning approval from the state's Central Coast Regional Water Board, which will review the plan next month.

To date, Monterey Peninsula cities have gone before the re-

gional water board two times, seeking a thumbs up on the plan to reduce urban runoff. But official approval continues to evade the cities. Both times, the water



-Raul Vazquez

board has sent them back to rework the storm water plan.

"We've already been spending over \$40 per capita [on the storm water management plan]," says Monterey City Manager Fred Meurer. "We've been in front of the board twice with a positive

staff report, but the environmental groups have objected each time. We felt they were looking for more precise details than we felt the law requires."

Now, with a new plan that NRDC and Friends of the Sea Otter say that they can support, city officials are hoping for a different outcome on Sept. 7, when the regional water board meets in Monterey.

Monterey, Pacific Grove, Pebble Beach and Carmel have been charged with finding a way to stop 100 percent of the runoff into the hyper-sensitive ASBS within their city limits since 1982. In 2004, the California Water Board filed a cease and desist order, but the cities have argued that the financial burden of meeting the ultra-stringent environmental requirements is too great.

Nonetheless, after what Meurer calls "hundreds of hours of work," they've created a plan that the NRDC can support.

NRDC's Anjali Jaiswal has been working with the cities of Monterey, Del Rey Oaks, Sand City, Seaside, Marina, Pacific Grove and the County of Monterey to improve drafts of their storm water management plans. Five years ago, all seven jurisdictions agreed to join forces and develop a regional storm water program for the Monterey Peninsula and surrounding areas. Carmel-by-the-Sea and the Pebble Beach Company chose to develop independent plans.

"We worked for many months to improve their plans," Jaiswal says. "We feel it's tremendously improved from previous drafts. However, I'm excluding Carmel and Pebble Beach because those two entities have chosen not to join."

Carmel city officials argue that because the city's population is less than 10,000, they should have different requirements. Similarly, the Pebble Beach Company says that it's not a city, and therefore, should not have to meet the same standards.

"They took their marbles and went home instead of trying to be part of the solution," Jaiswal says. "Their reasons don't hold water."

The new proposed Monterey Region Storm Water Management Plan, according to Jaiswal, will be more effective in eliminating urban runoff for two reasons: First, it calls for improved monitoring of the region's storm water system and waters. Second, it regulates all construction and post-construction activities in the Monterey region, which Jaiswal calls "one of the worst types of

storm water pollution" because of the type and quantities of contaminants that they produce.

In addition, Jaiswal says positive amendments to the plan also include inspections of all commercial and industrial storm water sources, a ramped-up public education program targeting students from kindergarten through college, advanced methods of identifying and stopping illegal polluters, and the applications of "blue water" design standards to development and redevelopment.

The Central Coast Regional Water Board will review the Monterey Region's new Storm Water Management Plan during its meeting Sept. 7-8. If approved, the plan will then move on for review by the State Water Board.